November 2009

Our history is no mystery

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

Depot Town Rag

Volume 22, Number 9

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Yesterday is history.
Tomorrow is a mystery.
Today is a gift.
That's why we call it "the present."

Another treasure saved

Laura Bein knows one good way to make history is to write it yourself. Her new book, "Stud Bunnies and the Underwear Club: Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives" comes out this winter. It will be available from Amazon or Border's Books.

Bein is a volunteer in the Ypsilanti Historical Museum archives where she writes the "Dusty Diary...an exploration of the Ypsilanti Archives" blog for the Society's Web site <www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org>. One of the most accomplished writers in the region, Rag readers have seen her melifluous and tasty tales in the *Ann Arbor Observer, AnnArbor.com*, and the *Ypsilanti Courier*.

Historical moments are often not pleasant moments and primary sources in history don't just tell the good news. Bad news gets more attention. Good news, in fact, seldom get attention in the history books.

Every so often in our neighborhood's story, the editor fantasizes with the idea of "going daily." The October issue of The Rag *was sitting on the presses at Standard Printing when the historic Thompson Block was burning across the street.*

Depot Town:
Certified
100% OLD
Maybe even historic

The façade of the Daisy Air Rifle factory in Plymouth, MI

Monumental!

In a letter to the editor of *AnnArbor.com* (4 October 2009), Dan R. Eller suggests leaving the Thompson Block as it is. "It would qualify as the most historic looking building in Southeast Michigan." He compares the ruin to the Greek Parthenon and the Roman Colosseum.

"For history," Eller says, "that's hard to beat."

Of nearly 250 Depot Towners interviewed on East Cross Street last month...

52% say they remember "how it used to be down here"

36% remember what their parents told them about "the old days" down at the depot

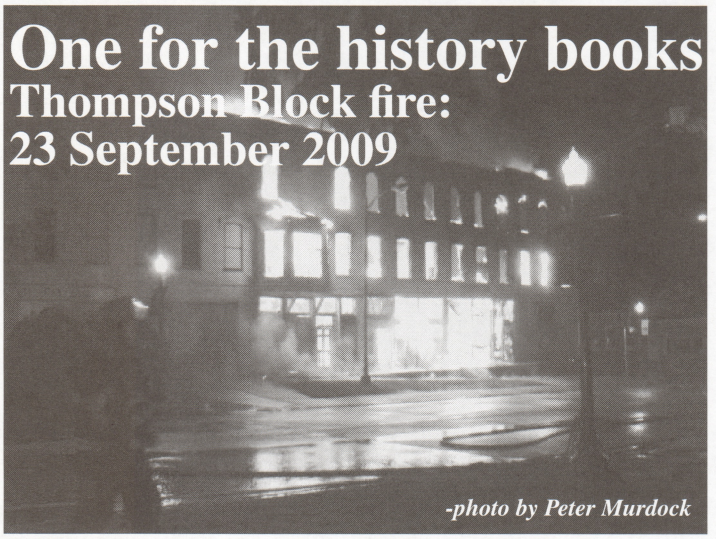
28% remember lots of stories, but none of the names or dates

20% can't remember what they had for dinner last night

12.5% can't remember most of last week

6% remember lots of things that never happened, but that does not inhibit their eager participation

One for the history books
Thompson Block fire: 23 September 2009



-photo by Peter Murdock

History is the "hook" here

Until the Thompson Block burned down, we've had a pretty good time with history down by the depot in Ypsilanti. Not that all the history has been "good history," but we've made the best of it.

"Why do you Americans make such a big fuss about your history?" asked a British woman who came here to teach art at Huron High School. "It's only about 200 years old and most of your history teachers have experienced much of it first-hand."

She was correct. Some oldsters on the block claim to remember when the hotel hallways above the Sidetrack went all the way to the river. Wrong. Never happened: no hotel, no block-long hallway, at least five separate, and unconnected buildings.

Nevertheless, when many of today's property owners on the block first saw this neighborhood, the prices were right but they couldn't afford to "get modern." So they decided to exploit the fact that the district was old fashioned. Today, even the new pole-barn shopping centers are trying to look like nineteenth century commercial districts. (See the Meijer complex on A^2's Jackson Road.)

"Old" has been good for us. Aubree's Saloon put their date of origin in their phone number: 483-1873. Some say they could have included the original telephone exchange prefix: HU- (for Huron), but not many of their customers would know what that meant; they're hooked up with cell phones anyway.

The district's biggest historical event used to be the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival. In its first year it was actually called the Ypsilanti Yesteryear Heritage Festival. Maybe the name was too big for the posters. Next year the "Yesteryear" was dropped and a few years later most of the "Heritage" part was forgotten as well.

"Down between the River and the Railroad Tracks" in Ypsi, most folks seem to favor the old ways of doing things and they just keep on coming back and perpetuating those values.

Yep, we're old fashioned and we like it that way.

Historical Quote: To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.
-Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940)

Capture the view from Old Town Hall

In 1909, the "New Cross Street Bridge" replaced the fist bridge built here in 1856. The Drubel Flouring Mill can be seen in this penny postcard from the period.

They hold "oldest" records on this block

Oldest house: Mark Norris's Greek Revival house on N. River Street at Maple, just north of the depot

Oldest businesses:
1873- Aubree's Saloon (Oliver House, Neat House, Dad's, Alibi Bar)
1903- Standard Printing
1933- Miller Motors, now part of the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum
1935- City Body

Oldest commercial buildings:
Dennis's Music
James MacDonald & Apple Annie's

Oldest DTA persident: Gary McKeever, 79, son of an Alabama coal miner who brought his family to the factories of Detroit to help will WWII; 3 one-year terms, 3 two-year terms = nine years at president of Depot Town Association, relected at DTA's 2009 annual meeting..

Oldest neighborhood joke:
"My brother Pedro was killed by the weasel."
"Killed by a weasel? How ever did that happen?"
"He was sleeping on the railroad tracks and he did not hear the weasel!"

A handy guide to tomorrow's antiques

We'll be more historic by next year

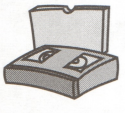
Source: Predictions from the Ypsilanti Morning Coffee Group, founded ca. 1939

Compared with The World's Last Hudson Auto Dealership and Ypsilanti's Last Print Medium Publication (*The Depot Town Rag*), other hangers-on have not hung on so well. Here in Ypsilanti's Historic District, preservationists are pretty well tuned-in to what's dying out and what we can still preserve. At Heritage Festival time, Our Town searches the exhibits for traces of our past but, if we can believe current trends, there will be a lot more "new/old fashioned stuff" around here very soon.

Here's a prognosis that should bring nostalgia right up to the moment in time for next years' Ypsilanti Yesterfest:

The Yellow Pages:
Just when you began to tell the difference between the two nearly-identical twins, a research firm predicts the falloff in usage of the Yellow Pages could even reach 10% this year -- much higher than the 2%-3% fade rate seen in past years.

Classified Ads:
If newspaper classifieds are replaced by free online listings at sites like Craigslist.org, then all newspapers may not be far behind.



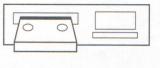
Movie Rental Stores:
Video rental stores are closing by the hundreds. Blockbuster still has about 6,000 left, but the stock was down considerably in 2008. Countless small video chains and mom-and-pop stores have given up already.

Dial-up Internet Access:
Dial-up connections have fallen from 40% in 2001 to 10% in 2008. The combination of an infrastructure to accommodate affordable high speed Internet connections and disappearing home phones have all but ended dial-up Internet access.

Phone Landlines:
The National Center for Health Statistics says, at the end of 2007, nearly one in six homes was cell-only and, of homes that had landlines, one in eight only received calls on their cells.

Chesapeake Bay Blue Crabs:
Last year Maryland saw the lowest harvest since 1945. The population is down 70% since 1990. There are only about 120 million crabs in the bay and they need 200 million for a sustainable population.

VCRs:
For nearly 30 years, the VCR was a best-seller and staple in every American household until being completely decimated by the DVD, and now the Digital Video Recorder.



Ash Trees:
In the late 1990s, a green species of beetle, now known as the emerald ash borer, found its way here with ash products imported from eastern Asia. In nine years, its larvae have killed millions of trees in the midwest, and continue to spread. They've killed all the ash trees in Ypsi and the rest of Michigan, with tens of millions more lost in Ohio and Indiana .

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Historical Quote: I know it is the fashion to say that most of recorded history is lies anyway. I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history COULD be truthfully written.
-George Orwell, "Looking Back on the Spanish War" (1942)

The Swimming Hole:

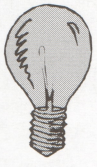
Thanks to law suits, swimming holes are becoming a thing of the past. Backyard pools have supplanted the real thing.

Cameras That Use Film:

We all notice the rapid disappearance of the film camera. In 2006, Nikon announced it would stop making film cameras, pointing to the shrinking market.

Incandescent Bulbs:

With the green movement, the Compact Fluorescent Lightbulb (CFL) is replacing the older, Edison-era incandescent bulb. According to *USA Today*, a new energy bill plans to phase out incandescent bulbs in the next four to 12 years.



Stand-Alone Bowling Alleys:

Most new bowling alleys now carry attractions like laser tag, go-karts, bumper cars, video game arcades, climbing walls and glow miniature golf.

Compact Discs

Vinyl is coming back to the music recording industry while teens buy their music digitally over the Internet. CDs were not around long enough for their outlets to learn how to write the plural form of the acronym for Compact Discs. Now iPod breaks all the rules that we learned in fourth grade English.

Bees

Beekeepers around the world report diminishing hives and bee cultures. Bees are important pollinators. Some say, when the bees are gone, so are we.

Snail Mail

Electronic mail and commercial delivery companies may soon put the USPS out of business.

Family farms

Giant mega-food producers produce most of the food offered in grocery stores. Farmers' Markets are just hanging on.

Paper checks

Electronic banking will soon replace that cute little checkbook you never could balance anyway. But don't expect the teller at your local bank to ever learn your name.

Home milk delivery

Just like doctors, nobody's coming to your house anymore.

Big Box TV

Television is becoming even less furniture-like. Look for TV wallpaper and another ultra-flat "set" mounted on your refrigerator door. At Aubree's new place in the township, there's a TV mounted in the men's bathroom mirror.

Same old, same old

But some old stuff is here to stay

Thirty "Old" promoters from current listings in the still-extant Yellow Pages indicate the desire for consumers to look for tradition, maturity, and/or mellowness:

Old prefixes: Country Buffet, English Homes. Faithful Sprinkler Systems. Glory Furniture Restoration, Heidelberg Restaurant, House Gardens Antique Bulbs, Inn 'N' Out Beer Depot, Mill Interior Designs, Navy, Oak Financial Planning Inc., St. Patrick's Church, School Construction Inc., Shack, Siam by Siam Kitchen, Town Tavern, Town Realty, Village Auto Sales, Village Bookshop, Village Landscaper, Village Properties, Village Yarn Shop, West Properties LLC, Woman in The Shoe, World Charm, World Stone Works, 23 Party Store, Village Enterprises.

And some "Olde" examples:

Towne Coin & Gold, England Chimney Sweep Service, Towne Plumbing Co.

So, what's new?

77 "New" listings, from "New Age Salon" to "New York Times Detroit News Bureau." "New" leads "old" by more than two to one perhaps indicating shallowness, immaturity, and upstarts remaining popular with a large segment of the public. Hang in there, Depot Towners; we will outlast them in the long run. Our track record is the proof.

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Historical Quote: And even I can remember
A day when the historians left blanks in their writings,
I mean for things they didn't know.-*Ezra Pound, "Cantos no. 13" 1.69 (1925)*

Miller Motors featured in *Michigan History* magazine

Chris Berggren's four-page story about Jack Miller's role in the Ypsilanti Automotive History Museum was also featured on the back cover of the May/June issue of the Michigan Historical Commission's *Michigan History* magazine.

New SUV model revealed:

#1. Escape
#2. Explorer
#3. Expedition
#4. Extinction!

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Michelle Shankwiler elected DTA V.P.

Following in her grandmother's footsteps of thirty-three years ago, Michelle Shankwiler was elected Vice President of the Depot Town Association at its Annual Meeting in September.

Beverly Shankwiler, a sculpture professor in EMU's Departmnt of Art, found her studio in Depot Town in the Seventies and moved her family into the building that had most recently served as the office and gallery for the first of seven visits of the Michigan Artrain.

Beverly and Don Shankwiler's son, Craig, brought his carpentry and restoration skills to many of the properties in the district and is part owner of Shankwiler 123 Gallery, with daughter Michelle.

Also-rans at DTA's 2009 Annual Meeting: Gary McKeever, Sandee French, and Ruth Ann Jamnick were reelected to the positions of DTA President, Secretary, and Treasurer respectively. McKeever joined the Association when the first Shankwiler was VP and is now the Association's longest-serving officer.

Local history that's worth remembering

- Cass Park and the War Memorial
- Waving at the engineer and caboose
- Civil War barracks
- Vintage Hudson automobiles
- Cruise Nights and Motorcycle Madness
- Personal service and genuine smiles
- Farmers' Market and window-shopping
- Concerts in the park
- Telling how you and your friends named Frog Island before it was a city park
- Street parades for occasions large or small
- Good times around tables and fireplaces
- Living above the family store
- Trips to local museums
- Sharing ice cream with friendly dogs
- Cool shade under the Cross Street Bridge

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In the next *Rag*:

How do the rest of the depots along the old Michigan Central RR line look today? Are they as sad as ours? Ride the train with The Rag *from Detroit to Chicago.*

Dexter's delightful depot houses a model RR club

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
The Old Caboose, 300 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
To the editor:
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Michelle Shankwiler, Vice President
Ruth Ann Jamnick, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street

This block doesn't fit in

Neighborhoods like Depot Town make a good show of keeping its citizens from getting sucked into the mall mentality. An "island mentality" is more prevalent here. We're somewhat insulated from the Main Drags of Mall Modernity.

Historic buildings and old cars set the stage for a practical culture, but shiny hubcaps and paint jobs are effective only when they can reflect the smiles of several generations of interested and interesting people.

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Historical Quote: In historic events the so-called great men are labels giving names to events, and like labels they have but the smallest connexion with the event itself. Every act of theirs, which appears to them an act of their own will, is in an historical sense involuntary, and is related to the whole course of history and predestined from eternity. *-Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace (1865-1869)*

Historical notes

Local history? We've got you covered:

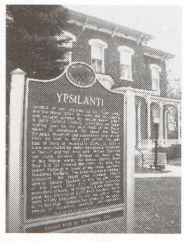
City of Ypsilanti Historical Commission

[Ordinance, District]

...guides development and renovation in the Historic District in order to safeguard Ypsilanti's built resources, according to the provisions of the Historic District Ordinance. Any proposed work done on the exterior of a structure within the District must be reviewed by the HDC. This includes new construction, reconstruction, renovation, restoration, or painting of any property or historic landmark within the Historic District, as well as work on site features such as driveways, retaining walls, and fences.

Ypsilanti Historical Society

[Museum, Archive, programs, *Gleanings]*



Asa Dow house at 220 N. Huron serves as Society's Museum and Archives

...a museum of local history presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by Society volunteers and membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents. A dynamic fund-raising campaign is under way to cover the cost of purchasing the builidng from the City and attacking many deferred maintenace projects.

Don't get "hysterical" on us

Jane Schmeideke "rankles" when someone comes to a meeting of the Historic District Commssion and refers to them as "You People." They may have unintentionally lumped together Ypsilanti's Ordinance, Society, and Foundation. This should help set things straight between which is governmental and which is voluntary:

Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

[Newsletter, programs, markers]

...dedicated to the belief that Ypsilanti's wealth of historic architecture is one of its greatest resources. The foundation, a non-profit organization founded in 1974, seeks to increase public understanding and appreciation of these architectural links with the past, to educate the community in the philosophy and purpose of historic preservation, and to encourage public and private preservation efforts.

Grammar Girl's Quick & Dirty Tips for BETTER WRITING *(hosted by Mignon Fogarty) grammar.quickanddirtytips.com*

"Historic" is an adjective that means something important or influential in history. So someone should say, "The treaty was a historic occasion." It was an important occasion. It would be incorrect to say, "We sell historic replicas" unless they are replicas that are important to history. You've probably heard TV announcers refer to "historic treaties" or perhaps you've visited some "historic houses" or "historic battlefields." All of these were important or famous things in history.

"Historical," on the other hand, is an adjective referring to anything from the past, important or not. We sell historical replicas because these are from the past; they're probably not so important. "Historical documents" are documents that record the past. You've probably read a "historical novel" or even a "historical romance," which are books set in the past. There is nothing especially important about these books; if they were, they'd be "historic books." Gutenberg's Bible would be a historic book.

Memory Tricks It's common for people to mix these two words up. One style guide laments, "Examples of 'historic' used incorrectly for 'historical' could easily run for several pages." William Safire said, "Any past event is historical, but only the most memorable ones are historic."

I've created a memory trick to help: You can remember the meanings of these two words by thinking that "ic" is "important," and they both start with *i*, and "al" is "all in the past," and those both start with *a*.

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Historical Quote: "History is bunk." *-Henry Ford (But he didn't say that when he was in Ypsilanti!)*

Since 1838:

Time's the test; old ways are best

Plenty of new and improved marketing schemes have come down the tracks to this little commercial district over the years, but Depot Town entrepreneurs have taken the standards and ethics of their forebears and continued a tradition of scale, style, and service that still seem effective with their clientele, employees, and neighbors. Begun when the first train arrived in 1838, the district has hung on to a traditional neighborhood standard that perseveres into the contemporary world of business.

"Why change the format now?" they seem to say, and neighbors still congregate to further the civilized lifestyles of the nineteenth century pioneers.

We cooperate, but we also compete. We argue a lot, but we agree on more topics than we disagree. We welcome new ideas and systems, but we respect the old standards.

When they heard the train was coming, Benjamin Follett and Mark Norris started something here that just keeps on keeping on and nobody seems to want to change those old-fashioned ethics of business and neighborhoodliness down by the depot.

Who knows? Depot Town's current entrepreneurs may even outlast the new pole-barn big-box shopping centers in the long run. Indeed, experts say we already have.

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Let's get something started "A Historic" vs. "An Historic"

Some discussers of history say "a historic" and "a historical." There are conflicting theories on whether to use "an" or "a" before these words. It's all a matter of whether you pronounce the "h" sound. One authority, Bill Walsh, feels that Americans incorrectly use "an." He acknowledges that "some British people pronounce 'historic' as 'istoric,' and that has led many Americans to believe 'an historic' is correct. It is not." He points out that if you said the words "historic" and "historical" alone, you would hear an "h" sound, so you should say, "a historic" and "a historical." Further, nobody would ever say a song was "an hit." You'd say the song was "a hit," and the "hi" sound at the beginning of "hit" is exactly the same as the sound at the beginning of "historic" and "historical."

On the other hand, *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, a traditionally British-leaning style guide, holds an opposing view. It recommends that you say, "an historic" and "an historical," but "a history." *The Rag* editors prefer "a historic" and "a historical," but no matter which way you choose to say these words, you're going to offend someone.

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